

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Bureau of Commercial Fisheries

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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT TO TEST NEW CRAB CLEANER UNDER COMMERCIAL CONDITIONS

The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries said today it has accepted delivery of a machine to deback and clean blue crabs, which are an important part of the shellfish industry along the East and Gulf coasts.

The machine has been hailed as a major breakthrough for the crab industry. After extensive testing by the Bureau's Technology Laboratory at College Park, Md., will be loaned to industry for testing under commercial conditions.

The American Scientific Corporation, Alexandria, Va., created the machine under a contract with the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. Blue crabs now are debacked and cleaned entirely by hand. Because of rising labor costs and the loss of skilled labor to other employment, the shellfish industry has experienced diminishing returns in recent years.

The machine is equipped to punch through the shell of precooked crabs, taking an amount of lump and flake meat comparable to that obtained by hand. The crab meat from the punched out portion can then be easily removed by hand. Tests have shown that the machine eliminates several steps of the hand operation.

Donald L. McKernan, Bureau Director, said research is continuing to develop attachments to the machine which will further automate the blue crab cleaning process. He said future research will aim at devising machinery to remove any flake meat remaining in the crab as well as meat from the claws.